

LATIN AMERICA

KATIA LEIVA

SARS-COV2 PANDEMIC THREATENS HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS

PROTESTS, RIOTS AND THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE

United Nations human rights officials have closely monitored quarantine enforcement measures in Latin American countries and have reported an excessive use of force. Food, water, and medicine shortages have led to social protests in many Latin American countries. These protests have been met with violence that has led to arrests in Guatemala, the Dominican Republic and Peru, among others.

These arrests are also a cause for concern owing to overcrowding and unsafe conditions in jails and prisons. Demands for protection against the virus have led to hunger strikes, escapes, and deadly prison riots. Some governments, including Chile and Colombia, have responded to the crisis through temporary release programs. Others, most notably Puerto Rico, are expanding testing capacities in prisons. Still, countries such as Brazil have not yet acted. Despite these efforts, Human Rights Watch says conditions remain unsafe in many countries.

In response to many of these issues, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, points out that governments should avoid using their military as a police force since they are trained using different tactics. She suggests that the military should only be used if

their role is clear, as they can be of great help in the distribution of supplies. With human rights bodies closely monitoring the situation, rights officials hope to see an improvement in transparency and rights protections.

“This is a time when, more than ever, government needs to be open and transparent, responsive and accountable to the people they are seeking to protect.”

- Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights